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ABSTRACT

An approach to organizing and implementing a conflict resolution workshop for elementary and secondary teachers, developed for use in the Lubbock, Texas public schools, is presented in this paper. Before describing the approach, the paper cites the need for training teachers in human relations and conflict resolution, outlines a step-by-step process for the speech communication teacher to use when functioning as an inservice consultant, and suggests guidelines for conflict resolution. It then tells how a court integration order generated concerns about possible conflicts in newly integrated classrooms in Lubbock, describes procedures followed by a staff development committee in determining needs and exploring staff development approaches to facilitate implementation of the integration order, and reports the committee's recommendation that a human relations or conflict resolution training program be provided for teachers. Finally, the paper describes the two and one-half day workshop that was developed, noting that its objectives were to train building teams in basic communication, conflict resolution, and problem solving. It discusses the workshop planning process, describes the activities held during the workshop, and notes the successful outcome. Evaluation questions distributed to participants are included. (GT)

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"ORGANIZING AND IMPLEMENTING A CONFLICT RESOLUTION WORKSHOP FOR K-12 TEACHERS"

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"ORGANIZING AND IMPLEMENTING A CONFLICT
RESOLUTION WORKSHOP FOR K-12 TEACHERS"

"Conflict in educational settings appears to be on the rise. Some of the symptoms are teacher, student, and parent militancy; parent apathy; voter rejection of tax increases; strikes; increased absenteeism; increased vandalism; and increased student violence."[1] Conflict, however, is an often misunderstood phenomena surrounded by myths and misconceptions about the nature of conflict itself.

First it must be recognized that there are many types of conflict and that it defies analysis in terms of generalizations as situations and personalities vary. Also it must be recognized that not all conflict is counterproductive; quite to the contrary, conflict may be the mark of a healthy organization or individual in some instances.

Yet it cannot be denied that our schools are faced with more pressure, aggression, change and conflict than ever before, resulting in teacher and pupil stress sometimes listed as the number one cause of poor discipline and disruption of the learning process in our schools today.

Such conditions have occasioned an interest in staff-development, pre-service, and in-service programs designed to intensify the classroom teacher's coping and communication skills. This movement arises at a time when our own field of speech communication is awakening to the fact that trained specialists in communication possess skills needed by individuals such as K-12 teachers and administrators who deal on a day to day basis with complex human problems.

The need for human relations training and conflict resolution training in K-12 schools offers an opportunity for expanding the role of the K-12 speech communication educator as an in-service consultant.

"If in-service education for teachers and other school personnel is not a prize concern of administrators and school boards it should be. Amidst controversies over busing, textbooks, integration, school discipline, and finances, it may be easy to neglect the morale and continuing education of adults who work with students. Such neglect can be costly. Each year thousands of talented teachers abandon the public schools and students fail or drop out unnecessarily."[2]

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[1]Frey, Diane and Young, Joseph A. "Managing Conflict in Educational Settings," National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin. February, 1978.

[2]Duke, Daniel Linden. "Developing a Comprehensive In-service Program for School Improvement," Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin. April 1977.

The previously cited need for staff development programs coupled with the limitations imposed by more demanding pressures and dwindling school budgets underscore the opportunity for the K-12 educator be become a valuable resource consultant. The ability to resolve conflict successfully is a learned skill, and for today's teachers could be a vital one.

The first consideration confronting the K-12 speech communication teacher when functioning as a consultant is a valid approach to in-service programming as a step by step process.

"The first step for successful in-service begins with a genuine effort to identify local needs or problems that can be met through in-service. The local staff development is usually most successful emphasizing suggestions from those who are to be drawn from a great variety of sources.

"A second process involves listing and catagorizing with comparison of personal and organizational needs.

"Third, the decision making group considers feasibility and assigns priorities.

"Fourth, commitments must be made on behalf of parties involved, administrators and teachers.

"Fifth, the commitment clears the way for planning and programming. Qualified individuals in the need area are essential to effective in-service. Planners are compelled to consider realistic objectives, types of in-service most likely to attain these objectives, activities to be employed, characteristics of the target population, incentives for the participants, appropriate media, critical time factors, adequacy of location, and proper evaluation.

"Actual implementation of the plan is the sixth process.

"The seventh, and last step is evaluation."[3]

After considering a systematic approach to in-service, the K-12 educator should survey materials relating to the workshop focus. Research and examination of conflict resolution and human relations training materials is in order. Care must be taken to select materials suited to the unique situation and for the specified workshop recipients.

"There is no one approach to conflict resolution but several guidelines can generally be applied.

1. The conflict should be stated briefly in the individual's own words.

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[3]King, James G.; Hayes, Paul C.; and Newman, Isadore. "Some Requirements for Successful In-service Education," Phi Delta Kappan. May, 1977. 680.

2. The level of the conflict should be identified as perhaps intrapersonal, interpersonal, subsystem, organizational, or environmental.
3. Describe the relationship between the individuals, groups, or organizations in conflict.
4. Determine in what ways the conflicting parties are interdependent.
5. Identify what the conflict is about.
6. Categorize the conflict by its type: factual, value, or strategy.
7. Describe the source from which the conflict arises.
8. Determine the severity of the conflict.
9. Describe your incentives for resolving the conflict.
10. Identify the forces that are operating in the situation right now.
11. Identify the style you are using to deal with the conflict.
12. Describe the probable rewards and costs to you in using each of the three conflict management strategies. (collaborative, negotiative, and power based.)"[4]

Finally alternatives for resolving conflict can be explored.

To clarify a possible approach to organizing and implementing a conflict resolution workshop the following example is included:

[4] Wyant, Spencer H. "Guidelines for Conflict Diagnosis," 1978.

"ORGANIZING AND IMPLEMENTING A CONFLICT RESOLUTION WORKSHOP FOR K-12 TEACHERS"

BACKGROUND:

In May, 1978, the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas handed down an order decreeing that the Lubbock Independent School District implement a program designed to integrate nine schools in the system designated by the court as built for the purpose of perpetuating segregation.

In compliance with the court ruling, the Lubbock Board of Education and the local administration began the process of studying the implications of such a program. In addition to the complicated logistics involved in busing and massive budgetary problems, the board focused attention on a plan that would eradicate all vestiges of segregation at the nine aforementioned schools and potential school and community problems that might be anticipated.

Concern was expressed for the anglo teacher and student in predominately white schools unaccustomed to dealing with the behavior and values of the minority child, the problem of the minority child's entry into an integrated classroom, as well as the plight of the teacher in the segregated minority school confronted with a multi-cultured class.

Primarily concern focused on the possible conflicts that arise in the newly integrated classroom that can result in the disruption of the learning process and promote community unrest, conflict, or violence.

The Board of Education adopted a policy limiting the use of federal funds for the implementation of the program, specifying that local funding and local personnel be utilized to analyze needs, and determine and implement programs to comply with the court order.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROCEDURES:

In keeping with Board of Education goals and policies, in the spring of 1978, the local district appointed a twelve member Staff Development Committee representing a cross-section of teaching and administrative fields and instructional levels. The committee was charged with the task of determining needs and exploring methods to prepare the teaching staff to facilitate a smooth implementation of the court order. Assistance in the form of personnel and resource materials were made available from the Community and Relations Service of the United States Department of Justice.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

Initial action taken by the committee involved interviewing teachers, administrators, and parents in predominantly minority schools in an attempt to determine conditions and behaviors which are potentially threatening to the child, parent, teacher, and administrator.

No particular format was used for interviewing; however, questions focused primarily on classroom or playground behavior.

Lists of behaviors and conditions complete with documented case studies were compiled by the committee.

A second step involved interviewing teachers, administrators, and parents from prospective receiving schools in regard to their fears, anxieties, and expectations of the integration process.

A second list was compiled and the two lists were then compared to form a third list to establish commanilities and determine priorities for human relations conflict resolution projects.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Staff Development Committee made two recommendations to the administration. First, the committee suggested that a handbook of guidelines and resource materials be made available to every teacher, administrator, and certified worker in the system. Second, the committee recommended that personnel in receiving schools should participate in a human relations training program or conflict resolution workshop.

Committee recommendations were implemented by the administration.

The conflict resolution workshop was designed for the purpose of training three-member building teams from the receiving schools to recognize symptoms of potential conflict and to implement conflict resolution programs and to serve as a resource team in their individual schools.

WORKSHOP PLANNING:

In the initial meeting Mrs. Virginia Myers, secondary speech communication instructor and committee member; Mrs. Bertha Hudson and Mr. Robert Alexander, consultants from the Department of Justice discussed concerns indicated from lists compiled in the needs assessment process and a possible format for the workshop.

To begin the actual planning process, the designated committee member and the two consultants determined goals and objectives for the workshop and building teams.

Through conducting a human relations workshop the Staff Development Committee is

attempting a program designed to train building teams in basic communication, conflict resolution, and problem solving. The building teams can help to promote better human relations in their particular schools and to provide a vital link for system-wide communication and problem solving.

Possible Team Objectives

-- To assume responsibility for providing human relations training for building staff.

-- To assist the school faculty and staff to understand the importance of their role and their responsibilities as models of human relationships.

-- To assist in identifying problem areas in school and to work with the administration to prevent and minimize potential problems.

-- To assist in locating and providing materials and resources related to human relations.

-- To assist or counsel individual teachers with conflicts or problems stemming from relationships with students, parents, or community.

-- To share information, activities, and problem areas with the central committee and to assist in designing approaches for human-relations development and problem solving.

Plans formulated by the workshop committee were then submitted to the administration for approval. Several complications arose which should be indicated since in the opinion of the committee the results of the workshop were affected.

Committee recommendations specified that building team members should volunteer for service on their building committee. Members were selected by the building principal.

The committee asked that principals involved in the court order automatically become members of the building team and participate in the conflict resolution workshop. Principals were named team members but were not required to participate in the workshop. This factor possibly had the greatest impact on the effectiveness of the workshop, imposing serious limitations on the activity of most teams.

The committee specified that a facilitator training workshop be conducted prior to the conflict resolution workshop in order to insure effectiveness and a degree of uniformity in workshop sessions. Facilitators were provided by the local League of Women Voters with only a briefing session prior to the workshop. This procedure diminished effectiveness in some groups according to final evaluation by participants.

Five days were requested for orientation, workshop, and debriefing sessions. Two and one-half days were granted.

In order to promote a positive attitude on the part of individuals involved in

building team activities, the committee requested that partipants recieve compensation. Per diem expense was provided as well as a small stipend for the year's activity.

The committee felt that the administration should be cognizant of the fact that the workshop was to be designed as an initial step and that extensive in-servce training should follow. Eventhough administration reaction to the recommendation was uncertain, it became clear that limited in-service would follow primarily due to limited funds provided under board policy.

Within the framework of limitations imposed by the administration and a constant reminder from the superintendent to focus on "the nuts and bolts of classroom instruction," workshop planners narrowed the scope of the workshop to focus on classroom problems related to cross-cultural communication.

After basic research and discussion, the philosophy of the workshop evolved from such statements as:

> "Culture has been defined as customs, values, and beliefs transmitted from generation to generation.....Culture is the foundation of human interaction. That is every aspect of our communication---the way we open and close a conversation, our language and non-verbal behavior is a reflection of our culture. It also controls our words and body movements, dictating the appropriate behavior for each situation and person. Without question culture has more influence on interpersonal communication than all other social contexts."

WORKSHOP FORMAT:

Following the analysis and priorities determined during the needs assessment process, the speech communication instructor and Justice Department consultants selected the following areas as targets for the workshop training sessions:

1. A fundamental understanding of the communication process and its implications for human interaction.
2. The role of selective listening and filtering messages and the potential of resulting rumors as causes for conflict.
3. Language of the minority child as a potential threat to the Anglo child or teacher.
4. Non-verbal behavior of the minority child as a potential threat to the Anglo child or teacher.
5. Attitudes and accompanying behaviors reflecting cultural predispositions or values of minority children as potential causes for conflict.
6. Teacher predispositions, attitudes, and expectations which are potentially threatening and consequently possible causes for conflict in the classroom.
7. An understanding of the nature of conflict.
8. The conflict resolution process.
9. Alternative responses to conflict.
10. Preventative measures as conflict strategies.
11. Identification of school related policies or aspects of curriculum as potential sources of conflict.

The project was scheduled as a two and one-half day workshop offering a variety of activities.

Participants were supplied upon registration with a handbook containing a workshop schedule, a statement of goals determined by the committee. Facilitators received a handbook containing the previously cited information plus a copy complete with instructions for simulation activities, case studies, evaluation forms and strategies to be used in workshop sessions. At the conclusion of the workshop, team members were given copies of the complete notebook.

Following a general session of routine introductions and explanation of their role in implementing the integration program, a lecture, demonstration, discussion with visual aids focused on the communication process and its implications in the classroom.

The group of approximately one hundred and fifty participants met in the first afternoon session in pre-determined groups of ten with the facilitator. Care was taken in determining group assignments to insure a diversity of interests and teaching levels and that teachers from the same building team were assigned different workshop groups.

Group sessions featured simulation activities, role playing, discussion of case studies, conflict resolution tasks utilizing group process, and individual activity. Case studies were taken from actual instances which had occurred in local classrooms and disguised for the workshop activity.

Following a full day of group sessions, groups were given the task of formulating their experiences in a statement representative of their group's feelings, discoveries, insights, and recommendations in a panel discussion with a representative from each group for all workshop participants.

An open de-briefing followed the panel discussion for the purpose of formulating plans and recommendations for the coming school year. Each team was challenged to assist in formulating programs for their individual campuses by prescribing that their first task be the distribution and analysis of a form, "laundry list," designed to indicate the unique needs of each school facility and to suggest the focus of further in-service planning. The survey dealt with the instructional program, school environment, school/community relations, and the instructional staff.

In an attempt to evaluate the immediate response to the workshop, the committee distributed a form asking participants to answer the following questions:

1. Is the task of the building team clear? State the task as you preceive it.
2. What task of the committee do you preceive as the most important task in your building?
3. What reservations do you have about implementing committee action?

4. What barriers do you anticipate in implementing committee action?
5. Rate each of the following activities on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 - Most effective; 5 - Least effective).
    a. listening activities
    b. case study exercises
    c. characteristics of a good teacher
    d. conflict task assignments
6. Which activity or activities might you use with your own staff?
7. What additional materials might you use with your own staff?
8. What additional activities or supports would be helpful?
9. What additions, changes, or deletions would you suggest for "Way to Go"?
10. What was the most valuable aspect of the training session"
11. What was the least valuable aspect of the training session?
12. Did your facilitator promote discussion in the group"
13. Did your facilitator encourage all members to participate?
14. Did the facilitator offer alternatives and options?
15. Did your facilitator use material effectively?
16. Did your facilitator help your group stay on the topic?
17. Rating from 1 to 5 rank yourself on the following statements:
    a. I was willing to experiment
    b. I made a positive contribution to the group
    c. I grew as a person

POST ANALYSIS:

The Lubbock model could be utilized as an effective model in some instances; however, the advantage of a workshop designed to meet the needs of a unique community should not be sacrificed. It would also seem advisable to design more extensive in-service programming to follow the initial workshop to maximize the effectiveness of the workshop as a media for change.

The Lubbock model, despite its inadequacies was successful in its attempted goals of creating awareness of potential problems and promoting understanding among its participants of the nature of conflict and alternatives in conflict resolution.

The K-12 speech communication educator is challenged to develop a new awareness and appreciation of his own potential to make a substantial contribution outside his own classroom to meet the needs of an increasingly complex society where demand for human relations skills is desperately needed, and to expand his role to include that of the communication consultant.

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